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Interview; Maynard Wright; Catrena Wright; 05-28-1994

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Maynard & Catrena Wright

Mr. & Mrs. Wright were members of Local 533 (Black) of the American Federation of Musicians, Buffalo, New York. They invited me to their home, Buffalo, New York, for an interview on May 28, 1994. Mrs. Wright is currently the President of the "Colored Musicians' Club," Buffalo, New York.

Q: Okay, sir. Give me your full name once again, please. I'm sorry.

M: My full name is George Maynard Wright.

Q: And your birth date is March 5th?

M: 1916.

Q: 1916. And the place you were born and raised?

M: Olean, New York.

Q: And you came to Buffalo?

M: 1955.

Q: 1955. And that was because of?

M: A friend of mine told me about a job in the post office. And I came up here to apply for it.

Q: And you got it obviously?

M: Yeah, I got it. Yeah. That's correct. Under disability, uh under disability, you know, you get privileged. You take the test, open up the test, and take the postal exam.

Q: Now was that because of the war or anything like that?

M: Yes, specifically World War II.

Q: II? I see. When did you become active with the Colored Musicians' Club? You remember when that was?

M: Not exactly, no.

Q: Like around about? Was it in the late '50s?

M: Was it what?

Q: Late '50s?

- M: Yeah. Late '50s. Yeah. I can't . I don't know who was it that asked me to play trombone with him?
- Q: Chetta?
- M: Who?
- Q: Chetta?
- M: Who?
- Q: Chetta?
- M: No. Well Yes. Cheatham was one of the first bands I played with.
- Q: Say the name again?
- M: Jimmy Cheatham.
- Q: Jimmy Chetta?
- M: Yeah.
- Q: And was he a Local 533 musician?
- M: Yes he was.
- Q: So you remember also then obviously as Local 533, goes ...
- W: No I was not a member of 533...[Tape Indescribable].
- Q: But you could play?
- M: I was a member of another local and I transferred up here. I was transferred here.
- Q: So you worked on a transfer card?
- M: Yes.
- Q: With Buffalo musicians here? In the '50s?
- M: Yes.
- Q: So you were playing with Larry Cheatham. You played trombone...
- M: Yes. Well, his name was Jimmy.

- Q: Jimmy. I'm sorry. Jimmy Cheatham. Okay. Now let's switch to your wife and she can give us a little background on her side.
- Q: Your full name is? Your maiden name you can give me as well?
- C: Catrena Washington-Wright.
- Q: Catrena Washington, and your married name is Wright? And you were born when?
- C: 4-22-22.
- Q: 4-4-22? And...
- C: No. 4-22-22.
- Q: 4-22-22. Okay. And you born and raised where?
- C: I was born in South Carolina.
- Q: South Carolina.
- C: Came to Buffalo before I was a year old.
- M: Uh huh.
- C: Stayed here most of the time except for two years. Went to Pennsylvania to live, then came here. From Buffalo to New York (four years) back to Buffalo, 1942. To Brooklyn, 12/46. To Henryville, PA, 1952. Back to Buffalo, 1953.
- Q: Buffalo _____.
- C: Yeah.
- Q: So you came to Buffalo what year?
- C: Before I was a year old.
- Q: Before you were a year old?
- C: And I don't know much about those...
- Q: That's okay. You came here with family?
- C: My mother and father.
- Q: Your mother and father? And when did you meet your handsome husband, here?

- C: '61.
- Q: '61? '61. So he was already active, settled in Buffalo, with Jimmy Cheatham, and...
- M: I played with Jimmy Cheatham first. Then I played with C. Q. Price and Arthur Anderson. He had a quintet.
- C: Didn't you play with C. Q. Price?
- M: Yeah.
- Q: C. Q. Price?
- M: Yeah, C. Q. Price.
- C: C. Q. Price.
- Q: He's a big name?
- C: Chetta is a big name now.
- Q: Is that right?
- C: Yeah.
- Q: I didn't know that. See, I learned something new already.
- C: He was [Tape Indescribable] and he used to play the trombone.
- Q: Really?
- C: Trombone, right?
- M: Yeah, he played trombone.
- Q: Now, you were married in '61?
- C: No, '67.
- Q: '67.
- M: '67.
- Q: So you knew each other in '61? Did you follow your husband's exploits in music as far as clubs?
- C: Yes.

- Q: Were you, so you were around the Club musicians all through the '60s?
- C: That's right.
- Q: Yeah. And you played an instrument, yourself?
- C: Yeah, the radio music! No.
- Q: You're just a member?
- C: That's right. I didn't play any kind of role. I was a guest of a musician member. Only musicians could become members of the club.
- Q: Now you are administrator? Did you play any kind of role with the Club during the '60s?
- C: Um, um...I think just bands. Remember 'cause at that time they were not open to non-members.
- Q: So if you were a member of the Club...
- C: It wasn't open to non-members. At the time you had to be _____ related to a member.
- Q: I see.
- C: But you had to be a member of the musician's to be a member of the Club.
- Q: Prior to the merger?
- C: No. No. Before the merger, I believe. Yeah, it was before the merger. They did that because they needed to regulate [Tape Indescribable].
- Q: I see. When did you take up an active role as an administrator because you are currently the president of the Colored Musicians' Club in Buffalo?
- C: I think that was about 1986, '87.
- Q: 1986, 1987 you became?
- C: A member of the Board.
- Q: A member of the Board and any other positions that you held?
- C: Membership Chairperson.

- Q: Membership Chairperson. How long have you been the president?
- C: About four years?
- M: What?
- C: About four years?
- M: Yeah.
- C: I think it's about four years.
- Q: About four years?
- M: [Tape Indescribable] Jimmy Legge, President Emeritus. He was the president and now he is the vice president.
- Q: Vice President. So you have an active administrator in this club for a number of years then. Well, we'll get back to all of your good stories. Let's switch to your husband for a second. Now, you know, I heard your name...
- M: Yeah.
- Q: ...a number of times.
- M: Oh, yeah.
- Q: And I'm glad that I got a chance to not only talk to your wife because of her role in the Club, but to also talk with you because, according to what everybody tells me, you are one person I should get to talk to. I'm finally getting a chance to visit with you.
- M: Really.
- Q: He's been holding out on me. I told him you went in to get the table that, uh, when I was interviewing Art Anderson and Albert Ridding he was there.
_____ and I remembered the instrument he played--trombone. You look like somebody I should have been talking to. You look like you've been around the Club a while. And, but he was content to play his trombone and enjoy the Club that evening so I'm glad I finally got a chance to visit. Did you hold any positions in the Club? Any administrative positions, Mr. Wright?
- M: Well... I was on the Board.

- C: You were on the Board? Do you remember what year that was?
- M: No.
- Q: Was it before the merger?
- M: Oh, yeah. It was before the merger.
- Q: Can you both tell me a little bit about the Club in those years prior to the merger? Financially, socially. How was it? Because my point in writing about all of this is that the Colored Musicians' Club in a very special way, preserved the identity of Local 533 and that prolonged the history here in Buffalo of black musicians. Something that wasn't absorbed by the merger. What was it like in the '60s? That's when I was born so in going backwards, how was it? Was it fun?
- K: Yeah it was fun.
- M: We had a lot of fun.
- C: We had a lot of fun. At that time we had a lot of members that were very active, and we always had ways of...Different ones had different ways about having fun raisers. But, uh, there was always something going on.
- Q: So you got revenue, not only from the musicians, but you also got revenues through the fund raisers?
- C: Yes. We had to.
- Q: Had to. Was it expensive to keep the Club going?
- C: Well, yeah. And it still is.
- Q: Still is?
- C: Uh huh.
- Q: What kind of fund raisers did you have?
- C: Uh, like Christmas in August.
- Q: Which would be what? Christmas in August would be what?
- C: You know, just like a Christmas party, but it was in August.
- Q: Uh huh.

- C: And we had the Christmas tree up, and we would give out gifts, exchange gifts.
- Q: And you would have to contribute to be a part of that party? Is that how?
- C: Well, for instance, you bring a gift and you put it up in the tree for a poor little girl or boy, and then that's how they would exchange the gifts and then somebody would pick out the gifts.
- C: What other kind of areas...
- C: They had Doristine Tydus Blackwell, she was like a program manager so she was also a singer...
- M: She was a singer.
- C: She would [Tape Indescribable].
- M: See the idea here was that you gotta have different appearances down there to draw the people. You can't draw the people [Tape Indescribable]. People don't seem like they want to come down there.
- Q: Now, now it's like that?
- M: Now. And you have to put on different appearances to try to draw them there because the only revenues is over the bar. See, if you don't get crowds down there to buy alcohol and beverages, you don't make no money. With no money, we get no money to pay the bills.
- Q: You don't have any fund raisers anywhere?
- C: We have them, but we don't have the cooperation from members.
- Q: I see. When you say you don't have cooperation from members, what do you mean by that?
- C: Well, say for instance we have to sell tickets. If we have about two to three that sell tickets, we can't make it that way.
- Q: So as far as the membership of the Club, you're telling me that it's a little bit weak right now?
- C: Very.
- M: Very weak.

- C: You've heard of George Holt, James and Lewis Hackney? They are deceased.
- Q: I've heard [Tape Indescribable]. Aren't they both deceased?
- C: Yeah. There was another one, but he wasn't a musician.
- Q: I see
- C: He's still alive _____. But we were _____. And Lewis Hackney said that if every member would spend \$5.00 a week, we would never have to have a fund raiser. And that still holds today, but we don't get the people. Now we are behind on a lot of bills. And we have a drive on now. If every member and music lover would contribute \$15.00 we would be able to pay our taxes.
- Q: Is the tax on that building expensive?
- C: Very.
- Q: So that's right there a big chunk of money, not to mention utilities. What else do you have as far as expenditures go on the Club?
- C: Well, upkeep, you know. Things go wrong. The beer cooler right now is in need of repair. Not the beer cooler, uh, the...
- Q: The beer...
- C: What we keep the beer in. Right.
- Q: Yeah.
- C: That needs repair. We are trying to get people that can do that without charging us an arm and a leg. Like we have members that are electricians and plumbers or someone who may be willing to do the repair for us.
- Q: For free.
- C: If they can. That's about the way we have been making it.
- Q: [Tape Indescribable]. Now how many active members do you have in the Club right now, as far as numbers. How many do you have?
- M: [Tape Indescribable]. I'd say 20 at the most.

- Q: Twenty?
- M: Uh huh.
- C: Like we got Tony Yaeger, for instance. We have about ten bar stools, and they were all, you know, metal. He took one home--Back and seat were upholstered. He paid for the material himself.
- M: Correction. We paid for the material.
- C: Oh, we paid for the materials. Tony upholstered it. Between the two of them, we furnished the money and Tony furnished the labor to get them all repaired. Tony upholstered 11 other bar stools.
- Q: That's terrific.
- C: And we had the electrician that would come around and do work for us who is a member. And he never asked for anything. And let's see who else...I think a lady used to do a lot of that. I'm not sure. we can't do it all.
- Q: You can't think of who else?
- C: Oh, now Roy Hicks, day bartender. He is very quiet, but he'll do just anything that you ask him to do, like mopping. Like if there's nobody there, he'll just clean up with out being asked. Um, I can't think of...See he does so much. But now his mother is sick, and he has to take care of her every other month. He was _____ for a sixth time, too. She has alzheimers.
- Q: Oh no.
- C: So _____ for Buffalo. I don't know if you know about it or not, but people often did certain things for years and years and years and you take them away from that, they are disoriented. And you just can't stay there. He's having a lot of problems. So that's why he had to take her back to North Carolina. So he can go down this month so his mother _____. So when here's a way to get things done at the Club unless some of us can do it. And that mop is too heavy for me.
- Q: Now how long has the Club been in this kind of condition? Because in the '60s when you all first started going to the Club it was
- C: In the black.

- Q: ...it was in the black financially. Members, lot of folks coming through, no problems financially.
- M: No.
- Q: It was hopping all the time.
- C: The problem...When we had the Count Bassie Band. Did he tell you about the Count Bassie Band?
- Q: No. Tell me all about it?
- C: Well, we had a fund raiser, and it was an anniversary--the 40th?
- M: Somewhere around there.
- C: Well, anyway we had the Count Bassie Band come play somewhere near the airport. I forgot the name of the place. And we didn't get the support and we were in the hole. One of the members, I won't tell the name, Beckett or something he bailed us out.
- Q: What year was that?
- C: Oh, I can't remember. It was the 50th Anniversary.
- M: Fiftieth?
- C: Could have been in the '50s.
- M: Couldn't be more than four, five years ago.
- C: We just had our...This is our 59th anniversary coming up!
- Q: Oh really.
- C: Yeah.
- Q: What date is the 59th anniversary?
- C: The 14th of July.
- Q: The 14th of July is the 59th anniversary of the Colored Musicians' Club.
- C: Last year we had an anniversary meeting at the Martin Luther King Park.
- Q: Very nice!

C: With the help of the Council, you know the City Council. And Agnes Baines, director from the African Lecture Center.

Q: Agnes Baines.

C: ...from the social center. And, uh, I think I said the Council, but Joe _____ was musical _____ did most. And we had T-shirts to sell. We would have thought that every member would have bought a t-shirt. So I still have some left that I haven't been able to sell. _____ we didn't even make our money back, 'cause it has our name.

Q: Now how long ago did this decline start? That you can recollect because you mentioned in the '60s everything was okay? [Tape Indescribable]. When did it start? Did it start with the merger?

C: Oh no!

Q: So you were still fine after the merger? When did the decline start? The activity?

C: Uh, I think it started around the time of the Jazz Triangle.

Q: The Jazz Triangle Project?

C: Yes, I think so.

Q: In the '70s? Wasn't it around '75-'77?

C: I don't remember.

Q: In the '80s maybe?

M: Yeah, more like early '80s.

C: Yeah, early '80s.

Q: Do you think it had anything to do with the grant itself

C: Oh, yes.

Q: Actually...

C: Eighty thousand dollar grant. It was in the paper. You had to buy the Moonglow for \$50,000.00.

Q: You had to?

- C: Yeah. Otherwise we would have lost the grant.
- Q: So that was part of the deal?
- C: Yeah.
- Q: For getting the grant, you had to buy the Moonglow?
- C: But we didn't know that at the time.
- Q: You didn't?
- C: We started using the money for an air conditional unit and furnace. Without the grant, we would have been unable to pay for them.
- M: New music system.
- C: New music system and did I say new roof?
- Q: No.
- C: New roof. So we were told that if we didn't buy the Moonglow, we wouldn't get the \$80,000.00. And when we started that roof, we were forced to buy it. Or we couldn't have paid for the air conditioner or the furnace.
- Q: So you bought the Moonglow? What happened?
- C: Then we had to sell the Moonglow for \$1.00.
- Q: You had to sell the Moonglow for \$1.00?
- C: Politics.
- Q: Politics? I seem to get the impression from talking to people about the Jazz Triangle Project that it created some hard feelings among some of the members of the Club. Seems to me that there was a split over what should be done with the money, with the grant, with the whole project with the running of the Club, and so on. Am I correct in assuming that?
- C: Uh huh.
- Q: And since that time, the spirit hasn't been there because that whole thing caused a division. That's what I seem to get out of the whole story. It's sad to hear that, but it's nice to finally get it confirmed though.
- C: Yep.

- Q: That's...That whole thing is still on ice isn't it?
- C: Yeah...Well, yeah I guess so, but they...Jack _____ was not supposed to sell it, the Moonglow, without getting any signatures. And he shamed it up, somehow or another. It's over the \$70,000.00. And the man that was holding the mortgage, I guess you can say, he was paying the taxes every year. He didn't buy it, but he was paying the taxes. And then after he begged us to sell it, he got his \$35,000.00 and the Jazz Triangle got the other \$35,000.00. Now this was told to me by the president of the Jazz Triangle.
- Q: I know who the vice president was.
- C: Yeah.
- Q: I think that was _____.
- C: No.
- Q: No?
- C: Willie Dorsey.
- Q: Willie Dorsey was president?
- C: Vice President.
- Q: So who was the President of the Jazz Triangle?
- C: I never...I can never think of his name. I would say he was...I would swear he was the first president. The, this other fellow became president.
- Q: Was it Les Davis?
- C: No. Les Davis was secretary. _____ we asked for a ballot. And always it's in escrow.
- Q: Who's name is it in?
- C: I couldn't give you any information. 'Cause there is nothing we can do.
- Q: Was there any kind of realty sign?
- C: Um, Um.
- Q: Some feelings were stepped on some toes. Since that time the club has steadily gone down. What do you think about it's future?

- M: [Tape Indescribable]
- Q: What's the worst thing that could happen?
- C: They take...They put a lock on the door for back taxes.
- Q: Is that a possibility?
- C: Yes. It happened once before, but we were able to get \$2,000.00. In two weeks we paid it.
- Q: Do you remember the year?
- C: Um, It's about...It was after _____. It's about five years ago. I would say it's about five years ago.
- Q: Consider the legacy of the Club had, do you think there would be a little shame for losing?
- C: Oh, yeah. _____ got sick. We were looking for a place to buy. We would sell that and buy another club. The building itself is not historic, it's the name.
- Q: Is this not a historical landmark?
- C: Not the building?
- Q: No?
- C: Just the name.
- Q: Just the name?
- C: So you can go anyplace...
- Q: I see.
- C: ...within the United States, New York State. I don't think we can go outside. It would have to be in New York State.
- Q: So you're looking for another place?
- C: No. We can't afford it.
- Q: Are you sure?
- C: But if we...I mean that was before Jimmy became ill
- Q: He's doing pretty good.
- C: Yeah.

- Q: I think he was a little apprehensive talking with me because of his condition. He has a hard time expressing himself.
- C: He's got it.
- Q: He did great.
- C: He got it up there but just his speech trying to get through.
- Q: Even though he had some difficulty expressing himself I got some of those [Tape Indescribable].
- M: [Tape Indescribable]
- Q: Terrific versions. Just terrific.
- C: You know he got that beam started out at UB.
- Q: What's that?
- C: You go to UB?
- Q: No. Buffalo State.
- M: Buffalo State.
- C: Well, Beam is the...It's for anything high school kids use, various courses, and _____ for. His wife seemed to believe that it was because of that that he got sick because he had to do everything. _____ to help people from going under. The had hired one person, Jerry _____.
- M: Jerry couldn't do it.
- C: He was too much. We got a big batch of people _____. It's still going strong. But they have a lot more people working now. When Jimmy was there, he had most of the skills and the students would do secretarial work.
- Q: What does Beam stand for?
- C: BEAM. Buffalo Area Engineering Awareness for Minorities.
- Q: Is it the way they help...
- C: It's something about engineering...

- Q: ...help those get through the engineering program that might not have the funding?
- C: Yes.
- Q: I see. You know what I'd like to talk about lastly, unless there's something else you want to add.
- C: The Wednesday Niters, nine women in a chorus line, singing, dancing, etc. in 1986 until 1991. We gave bus trips to Atlantic. With the proceeds we were able to buy tables and chairs as well as donate money to help where needed. It was a program, I think there was nine of us.
- Q: Uh huh.
- C: And...
- Q: Nine of us. You're including yourself?
- C: Yeah.
- Q: Pretty good.
- C: We gave a lot of cabarets downstairs.
- Q: A what?
- C: A cabaret.
- Q: A cabaret?
- C: Uh huh. And we had managed the _____.
- Q: When was this?
- C: Uh, that was in about '87 I believe.
- Q: Uh huh.
- C: And It was very successful, and then we had another one, and another one, and yet another one, and went to the Nugget and had another one. I think we had it two or three times. And very successful, but the last time I guess we didn't make it. [Tape Indescribable]. And we, with the money that we made, we bought chairs and tables for the Club. And when Atlantic City trips and with practice, we turned it over to the Club. So [Tape Indescribable].
- Q: Now is the...Currently is the Club used by somebody?

- C: If we have rehearsals, we might...When we did have rehearsals on Friday... Dining club...We use to have rehearsals. [Tape Indescribable].
- Q: Was your husband in?
- C: Yeah. And when...
- Q: Do you remember the names of the bands that rehearsed in the Club?
- C: Okay. Monday, Art Anderson; Tuesday, Chuck Lawrence; Wednesday, Joe Bando. But I don't...He's been working on something now, and he hasn't been back. Thursday, Carol McLaughlin...
- Q: Carol McLaughlin?
- C: Uh huh. Friday, well we have happy hour. No bands practice. That's Friday. Saturday, the bands.
- M: That's rehearsal bands. The guys just want to play.
- Q: Tell me how you got started? Yeah. Tell me how you got started?
- M: Well, for a while we had rehearsals at a place on East Utica Street in the basement. The group was called Apollo Cellarets.
- Q: I heard you at _____ a couple of weeks ago.
- M: And they have a rehearsal group up there and...I guess they must have had, what do you call it, a grant. And they lost the grant so they stopped rehearsing.
- Q: Yeah, but that's not how you got started?
- M: Well I'm telling you...
- Q: Okay. I'm sorry.
- M: When they stopped rehearsing down there, I got some of the guys to come down to the Club and rehearse with me.
- C: No. [Tape Indescribable]. He backed him up, you know. Like Larry Salters and some of the other fellows.
- M: Larry....
- C: They hadn't been playing too much. And we were having a hard time following the charts at the rehearsals so we figured when we leave here, we would come up to the Club

and we would go over it so by the time you get back next Saturday, you would know it. So that's how that started and it's been over ten years now.

Q: Huh.

C: And the same people are with them.

M: Do you know that Jimmy managed a female singer?

Q: No.

C: Well, she was a little too much pain working, when she came in your band.

M: No. No. She just got started.

Q: This was about ten years ago? Is that what's happening?

M: Well, it was about eight years ago. She was gone before that...Just...Well, you move some...

C: Yeah, she started from the Utica Street Club and coming up here.

M: Yeah.

C: But, I mean, when she came in...I don't know where she came, but now she's good and she plays with most of the bands. And now she plays with _____.

Q: I think so. I think I recognize her name. Now maybe we can talk a little bit about the '60s prior to the merger. and then after, how did white musicians factors into the puzzle? Were they there? Were they active? Did they come to the club?

C: Always.

M: We always had white musicians that were members of 533.

Q: Do you remember any names?

M: No. I can't remember them.

Q: But you had some?

C: Audrey LaDow is the only one I remember. And she was on the board.

Q: Argie McDowell. Is she still around?

- C: As far as I know.
- Q: I have been trying to get a hold of her. If you... Could you find out how I can get in touch with her? That would be great. 'Cause nobody seems to know where she is at. The last word was that maybe she was in Tonawanda.
- C: Don't know where she is.
- Q: So you had white musicians that came to the Club?
- C: Uh huh.
- Q: For the jam sessions?
- M: Oh, yeah.
- Q: Did you have a beer, socialized?
- M: Oh, yeah.
- C: Oh Eddie McKay. Know him?
- Q: No.
- C: Oh he's a saxophone player. He's good, too.
- Q: White?
- C: Yeah.
- M: Yeah.
- Q: This is before and since the merger?
- M: Yes.
- Q: Uh huh. Who's the other fellow that they had a party for him and people didn't show up? What's his name?
- M: I can't think of him.
- Q: Did you play with any white bands prior to the merger?
- M: You know, it's hard to remember way back then, you know?
- Q: Uh huh. Now I heard rumors that there were some white musicians who were members of Local 533. There were some white musicians that came to the Club, but there weren't that many? After the merger I heard there was a lot more.

C: Now I would say there was more before.

M: There was more before the merger. [Tape Indescribable]
after the merger. But, a lot of them came down there
rehearse down there.

Q: Now?

C: Tuesday and Wednesday. Chuck Lawrence...

M: Chuck Lawrence is white.

Q: Now do these bands have to play to rehearse at the Club?

M: No. Only for the Easter Ball.

Q: They don't!

M: Not at all.

Q: How come?

C: Well, that's what the Club was all about.

Q: So if you're a member of the Club...Does a membership cost how much?

M: \$25 a year.

C: \$25 a year.

Q: That's all?

M: That's all.

C: That's all. And \$5 initiation fee, as long as you remain current.

Q: What do you have to do to be a member of the Club?

C: Fill out an application. That's all. And as long as you respect the Club, and respect yourself in the Club. [Tape Indescribable]. I don't think... there's only two people, that's in my knowledge, that have been barred from the Club.

Q: Speaking from disrespectful behavior?

C: Well two of them behavior. One was all out against the Club.

Q: How come?

- C: Well, I can't tell you. I don't want to tell you that.
- Q: I see.
- C: It's somebody you already talked to.
- Q: Going back to the Jazz Triangle Project. You know, I got that feeling. I got that feeling. That's too bad.
- M: It is.
- C: It's too bad.
- Q: Because if the...
- C: See, we had to take the, the...What's the name of the president of Club? We had to take him to court.
- M: Yeah.
- C: He's from Canada. He's white.
- Q: You had to take him to court?
- C: Yeah.
- Q: How come?
- C: First of all, he locked the door. You've been in the Club?
- Q: Yes.
- C: You know when you come in the downstairs door, there's a door on your right?
- Q: Yes ma'am.
- C: Well, we have to use that door to go down to the basement. There's _____ a trap door in the kitchen that goes down there. You don't want to go all the way upstairs to take the dark stairs down. But he locked the door and wouldn't let anybody use...
- Q: When was this?
- C: Oh, about two years ago now.
- M: Yeah, about.
- Q: How come?
- C: Did you ever hear about Grover Washington?

- C: He was just angry. He was trying to get me off the Board for one thing. He had a petition out to get me off the Board, and so, as I said, we took him to court because he was...We had no other way of getting out, in case there was a fire in the front, we could go down in the basement through the back.
- Q: Now he was on the Board as well?
- C: He was on the Board at one time but not at this particular time.
- M: He was renting the place at that time.
- C: Yeah. He rented the place back then.
- Q: I see.
- C: And, but he only rented the orchestra. And we kept this space in case we wanted to have something in the back. We could have it as long as we gave him notice that we were going to have it.
- Q: Did you have to have permission?
- C: Just let him know that we were going to have it. So, uh, he didn't live up to his agreement and when he was not living up to his agreement and still locked the door so we couldn't get through, then we could...Uh, uh...
- Q: Oh.
- C: We won our case, but we didn't get anything out of it because we couldn't afford to go to, uh...We were supposed to leave certain things in inventory. And they took them--copy machine out, and we couldn't take him back to court because we couldn't afford the lawyer. So we won yet we lost.
- Q: I see.
- C: He was barred forever.
- Q: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the Club, Mr. Wright?
- M: Yeah.
- Q: Any good stories? Experiences? Anybody come through the Club that you found exciting?
- C: Did you ever hear about Grover Washington?

- Q: No.
- C: Oh! He got his start up here. He was standing at the door and waiting for the barmaid to open the door because he's a bar maid and this was when he came each day after school to practice.
- Q: Now when was this?
- C: Oh, he was a teenager.
- Q: How many years ago?
- C: Oh, I don't really know.
- M: I was 15. It was only a few years ago!
- C: Well, _____ was working for the telephone company. Seems longer _____ seems though that it was 12 or over 20 years.
- Q: Refresh my memory. Glover Washington?
- C: Respectful. Successful. He was a star.
- Q: So he just solos?
- C: _____ worked places with him.
- Q: Still?
- C: Yeah. He worked at Melody Fair last year and he had some people with him.
- Q: So he got his start at the Club?
- C: And he was very nice _____ all the men who came to the Club, who didn't have children, stated that if they had a son, they would want him to be like Glover.
- Q: Neat.
- C: Yeah. He did it. He came here to play at the Boulevard Gardens...Shea's Buffalo.
- M: Shea's Buffalo.
- C: And he came up to the Club to hear us.
- Q: When was this?
- C: Oh, that was before your time.

- Q: Me?
- M: I can't remember good on dates.
- C: No.
- Q: Now how do you spell his last name?
- M: Nelson? N-E-L-S-O-N.
- Q: Nelson?
- M: Yeah.
- Q: Herbert Nelson?
- C: No.
- Q: No.
- C: Oh, you would know. I'm sure.
- Q: Sounds familiar.
- C: What's her name?
- M: Pearl Bailey.
- C: Pearl Bailey.
- M: Her and her husband, Louie Belsm, a drummer. [Billy Easley came up to the Club.]
- C: You remember Pearl Bailey?
- Q: Uh huh.
- C: Well, her husband. And when she sang, he was the drummer. No matter what band he would come in and be the drummer.
- M: He'd play [Tape Indescribable].
- C: I think Chuck Lawrence got him to come up here.
- M: Maybe.
- C: I think Chuck Lawrence got him to because he wanted to rehearse where he was going to play, and that's why he rehearsed there so he rehearsed at the Club. And then he was gone and we seemed to lose him for a couple of years. But then after we got it cleared [Tape Indescribable].

- C: That's it.
- C: I don't know. [Tape Indescribable]. W. Easley, do you know him?
- Q: Uh huh.
- C: Well, he was there. He came up with _____.
- Q: [Tape Indescribable]
- C: Chico and his wife were up. They came.
- M: [Tape Indescribable]
- C: [Tape Indescribable]
- Q: Is that all the musicians?
- C: See, I guess I told you _____ before the merger and all of that. _____ the musicians didn't feel like getting together or something they just wanted to relax and play the band. They never come to the Club because _____, and they weren't allowed to go to the Club.
- Q: They weren't?
- C: No.
- Q: What would keep them from going?
- C: Closed [Tape Indescribable]
- Q: I thought so. That didn't come across too strong according to everybody that I talked to. That the reason that they went to the Club wasn't so much that couldn't go to it because they were black, it was because the place was closed. By the time they got done playing it was closed.
- M: [Tape Indescribable]
- Q: But, you're telling me it was also because of their color? Do you think?
- C: Race. It was race. That's what I heard.
- Q: Then it's true? Makes sense to me. It happened everywhere else in the country.
- M: Oh, yeah.

- C: Yeah.
- Q: You know, so...
- C: [Tape Indescribable] couple people up there they had food for them when they got there. _____ white people. Some of the people you know from around there would bring them liquor. They could always go up there and mingle. And enjoy themselves.
- Q: _____ wasn't that the Club initially had been established by an organization that was separate. It was never a separate organization?
- C: No.
- Q: It never excluded anybody on the basis of color?
- C: No.
- Q: I think what the problem...The whole idea of having, what first started back in 1917 and 1918 with the founding of Local 533, was put into, uh, the contract that no white people should be admitted. But over the years that was kind of faded away.
- C: You mean as a member.
- Q: Yes.
- C: Oh, I didn't know that.
- Q: Yes, but that kind of just faded away. This was way back.
- C: '70s.
- Q: But for everything I have heard and read, it was never a separate organization. If you wanted to come to the club you can come to the club. Didn't matter ...
- C: Uh huh, as long as you behaved yourself.
- Q: Yeah. As long as you behaved yourself. Nothing wrong with that.
- C: Uh huh. That's still _____ that we say now. That you can bring your mother in, grandmother, children, your family, as long as you want to be treated...How's that go, for a woman? I usually tell that women want to be treated with respect you will be.

- Q: It's a nice story, and I wish that things weren't so tough right now. It makes me sad because I've spent the past year on doing research on the issues, and on the Club. Chicago hadn't had many instances _____, and it makes me kind of sad to see it having so many problems considering the legacy. You know, because it's the only legacy it will have is--what some people have written about. Because eventually those who remembered the Club or were part of the club will probably pass away. So I guess I'm kind of glad, in a way, that I'm writing about it because maybe it will help, you know, especially the Club. Especially if the Club closes up. Although, I really don't think that will happen though even though it's tough right now. I don't see it happening, you know.
- M: Where are you going to publish this thesis of yours? Or is it going to be published?
- Q: Well...
- M: Where will it be for people to read?
- Q: You all will get a copy of it. Uh, my school; there's a professor at Columbia University, uh, who wants a copy of it; there's The American Federation of Musicians'--they want a copy of it; Local 92 wants a copy of it; Chicago 10208; there's a professor at the University of Ohio at Miami; George Selter, who wrote about the American Federation of Musicians for concert music--he wants a copy of it. I think that's all of them now. And during research on the Union and the Club, I contacted _____ leads on information. Everybody I interviewed, I am going to get a copy. I want to give them a copy of it. That's about 14 people I talked to, in all. I mentioned some of their names. The list is getting so long I can't remember everybody, you know. Now, in fact, tonight you mentioned somebody else, Carol McLaughlin, I think her name was mentioned.
- C: He. It's a man.
- Q: He. I'm sorry. Carol McLaughlin. Somebody mentioned his name. I think he was active with the Club back in the '60s as well. Wasn't he?
- C: I don't know. Was he?
- M: I don't remember him back then.
- Q: No. Not at all?

M: No.

Q: Then maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I just got...

M: Maybe in the '70s, but not in the '60s. I don't remember.

Q: ...a list of names. 'Cause my cut-off point is pretty much the '60s because I have to set some kind of time line. But I think it's been important to talk to both of you especially since you are active in the Club now because you give me some information about stuff that I don't have. There are a lot of thing you told me tonight I didn't know. Is there anything else you want to add? Any other stories? fund raisers, feelings?

C: We had a lot of fund raisers. We even had, uh, one...The old gang of William Street or something. I forgot how that's worded. We used to put the names of everybody we could think of during that time, _____ about three to four lines. Where are you now? Come to the Club and see our new member. You know things like that.

Q: When's the last time you did that?

C: Oh, Easter.

M: Easter. Two years ago.

C: [Tape Indescribable]

M: Not last Easter.

C: No.

M: [Tape Indescribable]

C: Oh I didn't know that 'cause I was on the Board out there.

M: Must be before last Easter. _____ all the seats were taken up and people were standing up and around the pool table and all around the bar--four or five deep. They, they didn't do it last year.

C: [Tape Indescribable]

M: We usually have a big crowd on Easter Sunday.

C: Van Taylor, TMJ, Taylor Made Jazz...That's a good one for you. Do you have _____?

- Q: Certainly.
- C: Well he's a young fellow that used to come up...I don't remember him coming up to the Club. He was very young, and he was helped by Al Tinney, and this is his way of paying back for what he got from the Club. He's been all over Washington and different places trying to get grants for us. Very nice young man.
- Q: Which is?
- C: When you can donate money and use it for income tax. Oh. Okay, fellow. We're all right over here. It's a friend of ours. [Talking to Dog]
- Q: Little Rustys...Terriers.
- C: Security System.
- Q: That's good. These days you need a security system. You know, no matter where you live.
- C: So I was saying, he's been all over. Sometimes he plays in Canada, too. Very nice boy. And...[Tape Indescribable] one day he was doing all he can to help us.
- M: [Tape Indescribable]
- C: He's helping himself. By helping us, he's helping himself. If everybody would do that, you know. You can't just live in this world by yourself. You gotta help somebody.
- Q: True.
- C: They say what goes around, comes around. True.
- Q: Well, you, know I've enjoyed talking with you here at your home, out in your backyard. Cool breeze feels good. It's been a pleasure and an honor to visit with you, and if you think of anything, let me know. Give me a call. I'll leave you my name and number, and I will be in touch because I'm going to transcribe what we have talked about. I will look over everything that was said. This dictaphone is really good, but sometimes the microphone does not work very well so in places where I cannot understand what was said, I'll leave blanks when I transcribe it. And, if you remember what you said, do like this. If not, don't worry about it. With that I think we will turn this little machine off. And I thank you very much.